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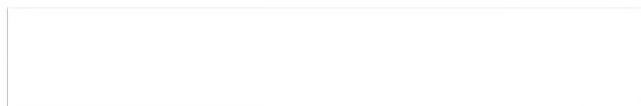
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Sunday 21 July 2019 Janelle De Souza

Creeping dictatorship

Guyanese opposition appeals for Caricom help

Members of Guyana's opposition – People Progressive Party/Civic (PPPC) – are calling on all Caricom heads to “denounce this creeping dictatorship” and to put political pressure on the caretaker Granger government to hold general elections.

Yesterday, at a press conference at the law office of Randy Depoo in Port of Spain, the Guyana opposition claimed that instead of preparing for general elections as mandated by the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), the government was attempting to further delay it in order to prolong their rule.

MP Nigel Dharamlall recapped the situation saying that opposition leader Bharrat Jagdeo tabled a motion of no-confidence in the government on November 2018 which was brought to parliament and passed by a 33 to 32 majority in December.

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Instead of accepting the outcome, the government sought an annulment of the vote, and both parties brought the matter to several courts for resolution until it was brought before the CCJ.

A CCJ ruling on June 18 stated that the no-confidence vote should be upheld and on July 12 consequential orders were issued. The order said the country's constitution should be upheld so Guyana's president David Granger and his cabinet must resign. However, they are to remain in a caretaker role until general elections are completed within three months, the time period the constitution gives for elections to be held after a successful no-confidence vote. It can only be extended by a two thirds vote by the National Assembly. Therefore, the general elections should be called before September 18, the opposition claims.

"In so far as we are sitting before you and the people of TT, the government has not called an elections date as yet, the president has not made a proclamation, the parliament which has to be dissolved three months before

the elections has not been dissolved. If you count three months from June 18, it takes us to September 18, so for all intents and purposes the government is in defiance of the constitution, is in defiance of the CCJ's ruling, and naturally, Guyana will be heading to uncharted territory, which is a constitutional crisis beyond September 18."

MP Bishop Juan Edghill said now is the time to put political pressure on the APNU/AFC (A Partnership for National Unit/Alliance for Change) coalition and support the constitution of Guyana. He also suggested a special session of Caricom to discuss Guyana and what could be done to show "political solidarity" and motivate the government to "behave in a proper manner."

He asked why Caricom was silent about Guyana's crisis when it sent missions to Haiti, engaged Venezuela, and initiated the St Lucia Statement. He said now that the CCJ has ruled, something needs to be done. "We call upon the leaders, the prime ministers, and all the civil society actors, the religious community, the private sector and all the progressive forces in the Caribbean region to denounce this creeping dictatorship and to call upon the caretaker government of Guyana to respect the rule of law and to uphold the constitution."



8/12/2019

Creeping dictatorship



Guyanese opposition MPs Bishop Juan Edghill, Susan Rodrigues, Nigel Dharamlall and Vickram Bharrat, alongside, second from right, Mae Thomas co-ordinator of the People's Progressive Party Civic, at a media conference at the office of attorney Randy Depoo, Woodford Street, Port of Spain yesterday. PHOTO BY ROGER JACOB.

Edghill warned TT Prime Minister, Dr Keith Rowley, “If you ignore what is going on in Guyana and you don’t do something now, the time will come when you will have to do something because Trinidad is the first stop by plane when people start pouring out of Guyana.”

He noted that last Friday, Guyana PM Moses Nagamootoo, seven ministers and others hosted an investors outreach at the Hyatt Regency Trinidad to engage local investors in business with the country.

He believes the PPP/C would form the next administration when elections are called and warned businessmen that no agreement signed during this interim period will be honoured by an incoming administration. “Now that is farce. It’s a charade. It’s an exercise in futility. And we would like to send a signal very strongly to all the businessmen and the investors in TT... that a caretaker or interim government does not have legal or constitutional cover to enter into any agreement, contract or negotiation on behalf of the state... We want to let the business community in TT know they should not be complicit in encouraging an illegality in Guyana.”

He added that in a recent press conference, the ruling party said parliament would continue to meet as usual. That suggested they would continue to introduce new bills and make amendments. Also the finance minister sent out a circular about a budget presentation on November 25, which is after the time the CCJ ordered elections.

MP Vickram Bharrat, head of the PPP/C election secretariat, said instead of calling an election date, the government said the list was voter padded with over 200,000 incorrect entries, and embarked on a house-to-house registration exercise of the voters list yesterday, which would take at least one year to complete.

He said while the list should be renewed because it expired on April 30, and house-to-house registration was not the only way to do so. He said Guyana practised continuous registration so all that was necessary was a few weeks of “claims and objections” during which time people could amend their voter information.

He said the current list gave the APNU/AFC coalition the majority in the 2011 and 2015 general elections, as well as local government elections in 2016 and 2018. He said no one complained then and it would have been the same list used if the government had done the correct thing and stepped

down in December and called elections in March.

In addition, since the chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission, retired judge James Patterson, resigned on June 25, chief elections officer, Keith Lowenfield, seems to be acting unilaterally. Also, as of yesterday, the PPP/C had not been communicated with or asked to provide scrutineers to accompany the teams conducting the house-to-house registration.

Edghill added that the constitution stated that the leader of the opposition has to submit six names for the chairman, who is supposed to be impartial, to the president, and the president should pick one. However, he claimed that Granger suggested eight names from which Jagdeo could select six. All, he said, were closely aligned to the APNU/AFC so Jagdeo refused to choose.

“Because the leader of the opposition has done that, yesterday (Friday) the president has publicly stated in an interview there would be gridlock as it relates to the chairmanship of the Guyana Elections Commission. You know what he’s saying? ‘The longer I take to give you a chairman, there will be no elections. And unless you give me a chairman that I want, which is from my suggestions, there will be no chairman.’”

Therefore, he said the president was creating a political and constitutional crisis so that the government can invoke the doctrine of necessity and have their own way.

“We are not here just because we want propaganda. We are here to let the world know while you’re not seeing fires in Georgetown, or you’re not seeing buildings being burnt, because the nature of the PPP/C, our struggle is always within the parameters of the law.”

Speaking to Sunday Newsday, Dr Bishnu Ragoonath, senior lecturer in political science at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine, said if the Guyanese government did not want to step down, no one could really force them.

He said political pressure could work but he was not certain any Caricom government was willing to do that at this point in time. “When we had the Caricom Heads of Government meeting in early July there was no statement on Guyana so Caricom simply sidestepped the issue. Nobody could say whether Caricom will or will not make a statement.”

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